



TEACHER TRAINING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF THIRD- TO FIFTH-GRADE EDUCATORS' CONFIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Third- to fifth-grade teachers are struggling to teach writing, and research has not addressed how their training to teach writing or their confidence in their ability to use effective strategies to teach writing influences their teaching. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third- to fifth-grade teachers' training in writing instruction and their confidence in their ability to use effective strategies to teach writing. The conceptual framework was based on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and Shulman's theory of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Participants included nine third- to fifth-grade teachers who had experience teaching writing. Data were collected through semistructured interviews. A priori and open coding were used as the first steps in data analysis. Next, axial coding was used to identify categories and themes. Findings indicated that participants used their pedagogical content knowledge to differentiate their teaching strategies in teaching writing. Findings also indicated that the longer a teacher taught, the more confident they felt in teaching writing. Finally, the findings indicated that the teachers believed that they did not receive writing pedagogy training in their teacher preparation programs, received only modest professional development once in the classroom, and desired more training to teach writing. The results provided insights into how training and confidence play a role in developing effective teaching practices. Results could be used by administrators and professional development coordinators to better support teachers in teaching the process of writing.

KEYWORDS: Writing, Teachers, Self-Efficacy, Professional Development, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Qualitative

1. INTRODUCTION

Many elementary teachers are not adequately prepared to teach writing. Studies have shown that approximately only one fourth of teacher preparation programs offer writing pedagogy methods instruction¹. Additionally, most professional development (PD) facilitators focus on reading; however, teachers also need to teach writing.¹ This lack of experience and training can create areas of need in teacher confidence in their ability to teach writing. Although there was considerable research on teacher confidence due to its association with educational and classroom outcomes, there was a gap in the research regarding third- to fifth-grade teachers' training in teaching writing and teachers' confidence in their ability to teach writing.^{2,3,4}

Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) are important to the success of teachers and their future students. In one study of preservice teachers, the participants reported that TPPs prepared preservice teachers for what to expect in the classroom.⁵ Many teacher educators suggested that strong TPPs supported them in obtaining their instructional goals.¹ These programs give preservice teachers pedagogical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, field experience, and confidence. Further, TPP programs equip graduates with the tools necessary to support and meet the needs of students⁶. Consequently, well-prepared teachers, who are more confident in their ability to teach a subject, are more effective in the classroom⁷.

Unfortunately, there is inconsistency in how TPPs train preservice teachers to teach writing. Results from one study found that there were differences between TPPs in different states and that the differences in the programs have a substantial

influence on teacher success in the classroom and by extension, student achievement⁵. Similarly, results of another study of nine English language arts (ELA) master's students suggested that although there are benefits to TPPs, not all programs are equally effective in preparing teachers for teaching writing. The authors also found that many TPPs merely taught prescriptive curricula, a gap which offered preservice teachers only a limited view of how to teach writing in the classroom.⁸ Further, another researcher explored K-6 teacher training and suggested that there is little support for preservice teachers to integrate what they learned during training into what they will teach in the classroom.⁹ This discrepancy creates a problem for the preservice teacher to incorporate what they have learned in their TPP into their teaching.

Teacher Professional Development

Teachers need ability and experience to be effective in the classroom. Thus, teachers with limited personal experience in writing or in teaching the writing process, may not be effective writing teachers.¹⁰ Accordingly, it is important that teachers engage in PD throughout their careers to enhance their abilities and knowledge.¹¹ Additionally, PD facilitates a process for teachers to build confidence in their ability to teach writing. For example, ELA teachers who had participated in PD placed their instructional emphasis more on the process of writing rather than only the end product of writing.¹² Further, teachers and students who participated in PD and training worked to increase the writing quality of students; as a result, the confidence of the teachers in teaching writing also increased.¹³ Data from another study suggested that although teachers faced difficulty in being able to teach the amount of material, they grew in confidence over time.¹⁴

Teacher Confidence

Teachers' confidence influences student motivation and their instructional decisions. Confidence is an important indicator of how much effort teachers will expend on an activity and how long they will persevere when confronted with challenges.¹⁵ Teachers with higher levels of confidence understand that they can support students by implementing specific activities, strategies, and instructional methods.¹⁶ Data from an examination of 523 preservice teachers showed that although the preservice teachers initially had high confidence, their confidence levels dropped after the first year of classroom teaching.¹⁷ The relationship of higher confidence in knowledge and ability was also supported in a mixed methods study of 28 teachers where a correlation was found between ability and confidence. This finding supports the need for pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and classroom teaching experience.¹⁸ Similarly, research regarding American and Canadian preservice teachers demonstrated that the more training teachers had, the more confident they became.⁷

Teachers build their confidence through experience and problem-solving. A recent study demonstrated that teachers create their professional identities through problem-solving and building confidence.¹⁹ Thus, the more a teacher practices, the more effective they are in the classroom. Equally important research on 848 teachers found that when teachers improved skills in which they had previously felt less confident, they grew in their ability and confidence.²⁰ Additionally, the more experience a teacher had, the more confident they were.²¹ Furthermore, data from an investigation into teachers' confidence development indicated teachers benefited from training in writing pedagogy, and through practice, their confidence grew, and they were able to see themselves as writers.²²

Teaching Strategies

The 6+1 traits writing model was developed to define the aspects of writing and streamline the processes of teaching writing and fill in the gaps of the Writers Workshop model.²³ The model defines writing strength.²⁴ These 6+1 traits consist of voice, ideas, presentation, conventions, organization, word choice, and fluency.^{25,26} These components of the writing process are broken down further into prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, and publishing.²³ The traits-based writing approach has been shown to work as an effective tool for instruction and assessment and provide ELA teachers with strategies and resources.²⁷

Another teaching strategy, advancement via individual determination (AVID) is an educational program that has gained significant attention in recent years for its positive effect on students' academic achievement and college readiness, emphasizing the development of writing skills as a means to facilitate critical thinking and comprehension.²⁸ In this program, students are encouraged to take organized and purposeful notes in all their classes, ask questions, seek answers, and engage actively in the learning process. Studies have explored the effect of AVID on student outcomes, and the results were promising. AVID has been associated with improved academic performance, increased high school graduation rates, and a greater likelihood of college enrollment among participating students.²⁹ One study found that students enrolled in AVID received more consistent academic support.³⁰ Another study showed that students who participated in the AVID program demonstrated higher self-efficacy.³¹ Moreover, AVID is often credited with narrowing the achievement gap for underrepresented student populations, helping to level the playing field, and providing equal opportunities for success.³⁰

Finally, the *step up to writing program*, developed in 2000 by Judith Langer, is an instructional approach that has gained recognition for its effectiveness in teaching writing skills to students across various grade levels.^{32,33} Using a color-coded system that engages students, the program is widely used in schools throughout the United States and has been praised for its ability to improve students' writing proficiencies by providing a structured framework for teaching writing in a systematic and accessible manner.³² Within the program, students are guided through sentence and paragraph structure, transitions, writing conventions, and the writing process. Research studies and educational reports have shown promising outcomes associated with the step up to writing.³³ For example, one study of 40 middle school students found an increase in writing ability in students who used the approach.³⁴ Further, educators have reported improved writing skills, greater clarity in student writing, and increased confidence among participants.³⁵

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore third- to fifth-grade teachers' training in writing instruction and their perceptions of their confidence in their ability to use effective strategies to teach writing.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are third- to fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical content knowledge of teaching writing?
2. What are third- to fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence in their ability to teach writing?
3. How do teachers perceive their teacher preparation programs contributed to their confidence in their ability to use effective strategies to teach writing?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS:

We chose the basic qualitative approach to conducting this study, as it aligned well with the study purpose, which was to explore third- to fifth-grade teachers' training in writing instruction and their confidence in their ability to use effective strategies to teach writing. The goal of a basic or generic qualitative approach is to understand how people interpret and attach meaning to their experiences and how they construct their worlds. Basic qualitative research can also be used to give insight into a process or phenomenon.^{36,37,38,39,40}

To collect a participant sample, we used purposive sampling to recruit third- to fifth-grade teachers by the following means: (a) sending emails drawing on our personal network, (b) publishing flyers on social media, and (c) using snowball sampling. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) have completed a teacher preparation program, (b) have teaching credentials, and (c) have experience teaching third, fourth, or fifth grade for at least 2 years. Participants were offered \$20 Amazon gift cards as an incentive. Participation was voluntary, and participants were offered an informed consent briefing and confidentiality. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Semistructured interviews lasting about ⁴⁵ minutes were used as the method of data collection. The interview guide consisted of 13 questions. The interviews were conducted remotely by Zoom; remote interviews have become a well-established practice in qualitative research.^{41,42,43} The Zoom interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved.⁴⁴ At the point of saturation, there were nine participants, a number that is considered

sufficient for a qualitative study.^{45,46,47} We conducted our qualitative data analysis in six steps.^{48,49} The six steps were collection, engagement, extraction, coding, conceptualization, and representation. Use of Quirkos software, tables, and charts allowed for visual presentations of the data. Trustworthiness was established using a reflection journal, audit trail, and member checking.

3. RESULTS:

We began the data analysis process after conducting the interviews. Qualitative analysis methods and emergent coding were applied to the participant's responses.⁵⁰ The data analysis process was iterative, involving multiple tiers of procedures to organize and review the gathered data. Initially, we established 10 a priori codes based on our purpose statement and literature review. In our first cycle of data analysis, we reviewed the transcripts and applied the a priori codes. In our second round of coding, we used open coding, conducted line by line, to reduce the likelihood of introducing personal bias to the participants' responses.⁵⁰ Open coding allowed us to locate emergent codes and make sense of the data. Through this process, we found an additional 47 codes. We reviewed the codes and combined those that were duplicates or shared similar meanings. Repeated codes were recorded as keywords, terms, or phrases, which were regrouped and organized into the final codes. Our next step was to create categories. After we organized the codes into categories, we condensed the categories into themes that aligned with the research questions. Throughout this process, we used Quirkos data analysis software to create color-coded groups to place codes and create categories. We ended up with 36 codes, six categories, and six themes.

RQ1. What are Third- to Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of their Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Teaching Writing?

Tables 1 through 3 reflect the data related to the corresponding research question. Table 1 illustrates the data that supported RQ1 and includes 16 codes, two categories, and two themes. These codes and categories were combined to form two themes. Theme 1 was teachers developed their PCK through experience and training. Theme 2 was teachers used their PCK to employ differentiated teaching strategies to effectively teach writing.

Table 1

Themes and Codes Connected to RQ1

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 1: Teachers developed their PCK through experience and training.	Instructional strategies	Decoding and encoding
		Differentiation
		Experiences of PCK
		Experimentation
		Holistic approach
Theme 2: Teachers used their PCK to employ differentiated teaching strategies to effectively teach writing.	Innovative teaching	Integration
		Student engagement
		Student-centered
		Writing pedagogy
		Writing styles
	Curricular resources	Writing styles
		Resources
		Educational programs
	Teacher observations	Cross curricular writing
		Educational programs
		Needs
		Observations
		Struggles
		Successes

Theme 1. Teachers developed their PCK through experience and training. In Theme 1, the participants discussed their development of PCK through experience and training in teaching writing. Participant 1 shared the initial challenges they faced in teaching writing, highlighting a sense of uncertainty and struggle in effectively conveying subject matter. However, Participant 3 offered a distinct perspective, emphasizing adaptability and pragmatism as key factors in building PCK. Participant 1 reflected on the early part of their teaching career when they encountered challenges in teaching writing. They stated, "I started trying to figure out how to teach my students how to write, and it was always very much like I don't know how to get to them or how to figure this out." In this initial phase, the teacher possessed the content knowledge but found themselves grappling with the pedagogical aspect of instruction and struggled with initial frustration and uncertainty in connecting with students and effectively imparting subject matter.

Conversely, Participant 3 discussed their approach to building their PCK through trial and error. The teacher acknowledged that their approach to teaching writing did not fit neatly into a predefined category or formal curriculum, stating, "I don't necessarily have a name for what I do because there wasn't a class I took." This gap suggests the participants' teaching methods evolved organically, based on their unique experiences and insights. However, Participant 3 also emphasized continuity in their instruction, mentioning that they continue to teach the 6+1 traits of writing, but do not always label the traits as such, but rather integrate them one at a time within an essay.

Theme 2. Theme 2 highlighted how teachers used their PCK to employ differentiated teaching strategies to effectively teach writing. Participant 5 underscored the significance of organization and graphic organizers in their teaching, integrating diverse information sources, fostering discussions, and distributing graphic organizers to facilitate information structuring. In a departure from this approach, Participant 7 navigated the terrain of the standardized curriculum while infusing their lessons with AVID strategies and step up to writing and scaffolding to provide vital support to students not performing at grade level. Finally, Participant 9 shared their scaffolding technique, starting with sentence starters and aligning their writing lessons with the school's reading series, illustrating the thoughtful integration of reading and writing in their pedagogy. Participant 5 also underlined the importance of organization and graphic organizers when teaching writing. They stated, "[I] give different sources, and then I'll try to get discussions going and talk about vocabulary within those articles and then [hand out] a graphic organizer." The participant outlined their instructional strategy of providing students with various sources of information, then initiated discussions centered on the content of those articles, with a particular focus on expanding students' vocabulary. After these preliminary steps, they distributed a graphic organizer to aid in structuring and organizing the information. Participant 9 also employed scaffolding to support students with writing development. They mentioned providing students with sentence starters to help them structure their writing. Further, they showed how their lesson planning aligned with the school's reading series.

RQ2: What are Third- to Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of Their Confidence in Their Ability to Teach Writing?

Table 2 groups Codes 15–23 to form Category 3: teacher experience and growth. We grouped Codes 24–28 into Category 4: challenges and constraints. We grouped Codes 29–32 to form Category 5: student needs and accommodations. Codes and categories were combined into Themes 3 and 4. Theme 3 was

teachers believed that the more time they taught writing, the more confidence they gained in teaching writing. Theme 4 was teachers believed they faced numerous struggles with student accommodations and needs.

Table 2

Themes and Codes Connected to RQ2

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 3: Teachers believed that the more time they taught writing, the more confidence they gained in teaching writing.	Teacher experience and growth	Experience in teaching writing
		Trust
		Reflection
		Adaptation
		Went of script
Theme 4: Teachers believe they faced numerous struggles with student accommodations and needs.	Challenges and constraints	Grow confidence
		Creativity
		Validation
		Cultivating customization
		Restrictive curriculum
		Cookie-cutter curriculum
		Standards-based requirements
		Not enough time
		Frustrations in teaching
	Student accommodations and needs	Accommodations
		Excessive accommodations
		Scaffolding
		Not writing grade level
		Struggles
		Successes

Theme 3. In Theme 3, the participants articulated that the more time they spent teaching writing, the more confident they became in their abilities. Participants expressed their initial uncertainty in teaching writing, but highlighted that by acquiring diverse methods and strategies, they gradually developed confidence and now felt at ease when working with students.

Participant 2 discussed their growth and development, stating, "That's definitely something I've had to grow into I feel comfortable." Similarly, Participant 7 expressed a high level of confidence in teaching writing expressing that they now "feel very comfortable now as a professional teaching writing." They attributed this confidence to their knowledge of different approaches and methods. On the whole, although the participants initially experienced uncertainty and a lack of confidence, through time and experience, they believed they gained more confidence in their ability to effectively teach writing. Participants 2 and 3 shared some similarities in their initial feelings of uncertainty and lack of training in teaching writing. Both participants expressed a sense of discomfort or lack of confidence in their abilities as writing instructors. Participant 2 mentioned, "I am only comfortable teaching third grade writing." Further, Participant 3 expressed a lack of personal skills as a writer stating, "I am okay, but I'm uncomfortable teaching writing because I don't think I have I have the skills to be a writer. What I'm doing works for some kids, but I don't know how else to do it."

They both discussed feeling uncertain about alternative approaches beyond the 6+1 traits framework and indicated that the existing methods may not work for all students. Participant 3 discussed having reservations about their effectiveness in teaching writing stating, "I am okay, but I'm uncomfortable teaching writing because I don't think I have I have the skills to be a writer. What I'm doing works for some kids, but I don't know

how else to do it."

In a discrepant case, Participant 7 expressed a high level of confidence in their ability to teach writing. They attributed this confidence to knowledge of curricula and strategies for approaching writing instruction. Emphasizing their belief in the importance of differentiating their approach for each student, even in a large classroom Participant 7 said they were, "very confident now and that's a result of knowing different kinds of curricula and knowing different types of strategies to approach with students in writing."

Theme 4. Teachers believed they faced numerous struggles in teaching writing. In Theme 4, the participants expressed various struggles with student accommodations and needs when teaching writing. All participants discussed challenges related to student motivation, basic writing skills, grammar, creativity, relevance, and engagement with writing topics. Further Participants 7 highlighted difficulties motivating students to write about topics that don't align with their interests. Participant 7 expressed that, "The writing prompts were not meaningful, not relevant, which we all know that's what kids need to be able to be excited about something." Similarly, Participant 2 discussed gradually increasing writing duration to build stamina, whereas Participants 4 and 6 observed that many students lacked basic writing abilities and focused on teaching them how to construct sentences before moving on to paragraphs. Participant 4 went on to state, "At the beginning of the year because we could not handle paragraphs so we would do sentences." The findings of Theme 4 revealed a range of challenges in teaching writing,

RQ3: How do Teachers Perceive their Teacher Preparation Programs Contributed to Their Confidence in Their Ability to use Effective Strategies to Teach Writing?

Table 3 shows that we grouped Codes 33 through 36 to create Category 6, preparation and training. The codes and categories were combined to create Themes 5 and 6. Theme 5 revealed that teachers believed they did not receive writing pedagogy training in their teacher preparation programs. Theme 6 revealed that teachers believed they received writing pedagogy during PD but desired more training.

Table 3

Themes and Codes Connected to RQ3

Themes	Categories	Codes
Theme 5: Teachers believed they did not receive writing pedagogy training in their teacher preparation programs.	Preparation and training	Experiences in TPPs
		Writing training
Theme 6: Teachers believed they received writing pedagogy during professional development but desired more training.		Professional development
		No writing pedagogy in TPP

Theme 5. Theme 5 indicates that participants believed that they did not receive sufficient writing pedagogy training in their teacher preparation programs. Participant 1 expressed, "I don't

feel like I was ever prepared in my teacher preparation program.” They mentioned feeling a strong sense of unpreparedness, describing a lack of structure and guidance in their writing process. Correspondingly, Participant 2 recalled a lack of “explicit instruction in teaching writing” and instead relied on applying reading and picture books to support writing instruction. Participant 4 recalled the absence of a dedicated writing class and a predominant focus on literacy development, where preservice teachers were taught how to teach reading, but not how to teach writing. Participant 9 struggled to recall specific writing instructions but mentioned notebooking as a suggested practice. These accounts collectively emphasized the need for comprehensive and explicit training in writing instruction within teacher programs.

Theme 6. In Theme 6, findings revealed that many of the teachers believed that they received writing pedagogy during PD but desired more training. Participant 1 highlighted the importance of PD and having people who can provide assistance and encouragement along the way, stating, “Teacher burnout is huge, and if you don't have people helping you and pushing you along the way, then it can be...that's how we lose teachers.” This perspective highlighted Participant 1's belief in the crucial role of ongoing support and mentorship in retaining teachers and preventing burnout. In terms of PD, the participant also stressed the need for continuous training in writing pedagogy to better equip teachers with the necessary skills and resources to effectively teach writing. Addressing this training gap, Participant 1 believed that by providing ongoing support, education systems can better support teachers and create an environment that encourages professional growth and job satisfaction. Similarly, in terms of PD, Participant 3 expressed a desire for specific classes dedicated to teaching students the fundamentals of writing, such as essay composition or constructing paragraphs. During their interview, they mentioned, “I would love to have a class on teaching students to write essays or even teaching students to write paragraphs like what's necessary.” Emphasizing the need for comprehensive instruction, the participant suggested that the training could be broken down into multiple classes based on individual preferences. Stressing the importance of understanding the basics, they also mentioned a need to watch the sequential steps involved in guiding students from the initial point to the outcome of a particular type of writing being modeled.

4. DISCUSSION:

Finding 1: Through Experience and Training, Teachers Developed their PCK

The first finding of the study emerged from Theme 1. PCK is a crucial aspect of effective teaching that creates meaningful learning experiences for students. As teachers had more experience and training, their PCK grew. One of the ways this occurred was through targeted PD. For all of the participants, PD played an important part in their growth as a teacher. This assertion aligns with research that found PD courses, especially during the early years of teaching, provided teachers with valuable pedagogical skills and tools to address their initial shortcomings.⁵¹

It is also important to note that adaptability and pragmatism were also key factors for the teachers in building their PCK. When the teachers stepped away from the predefined curriculum, and designed lessons more targeted to their students' needs, their teaching methods evolved more organically. This approach suggests that PCK can be developed through experiential learning and the ability to adapt to the needs of students. This

conclusion aligns with research who found the importance of experiential learning, innovation, and the willingness to try different strategies.⁵²

Finding 2: Teachers Employed Diverse Instructional Strategies to Facilitate Writing Instruction

The second finding from the study emerged from Theme 2 and supported that teachers used various strategies to engage students in writing instruction. One similarity observed among the current participants was the use of organizational tools to scaffold students' writing process such as the step up to writing, AVID, and thinking maps. These tools not only provided clarity but also empowered students to effectively arrange their writing pieces.

Moreover, flexibility and student choice emerged as key in the teachers' strategies. This assertion is supported by research that highlighted that teachers who employed an apprentice approach to teaching writing noticed more student success.⁵³ This freedom is important to student agency and growth in writing. A study suggested that students were more successful when they set goals for themselves.⁵⁴ When giving students freedom, the teachers in the current study noted that their students had more control over what they were learning and were more willing to engage with the material.

Additionally, some of the teachers used a cross-curricular approach to engage students. One participant showcased a creative and immersive cross-curricular approach to social studies and writing. Such engaging techniques highlighted the interconnectedness of writing and historical comprehension, sparking students' interest and investment in their writing.

Finding 3: Teachers Became More Confident the Longer They Taught Writing

The third finding emerged from Theme 3 and underscored that teachers' confidence increased with experience and time spent teaching writing. Initially, the teachers expressed uncertainty and a lack of confidence in their abilities to teach writing. However, as they adopted diverse methods and strategies and gained more experience, they developed confidence and felt more at ease when working with students. A study revealed a positive correlation between experience and confidence in effectively teaching writing as teachers evolved from initial uncertainty to a sense of ease and proficiency through the acquisition of diverse methods and strategies.¹⁹

In the current study, teachers' experiences in teaching writing demonstrated a pattern of increased confidence over time. Additionally, teachers mentioned that the longer they taught writing and the more practical experience they gained, the more they were at ease as writing instructors. These results are supported by a study that found that the more teachers developed their skills, the more confident they became.²⁰

This study also revealed that as the teachers became more confident in their ability to teach writing, they were better able to support their students. Participants reported being able to identify areas where students were struggling and help them overcome writing challenges. This finding is consistent with the results of a study that found that teachers who felt confident enough to adapt the mandated curriculum to meet the needs of their students saw greater student success.⁵⁵ Therefore, it could be argued that increased teacher confidence positively affects student support and learning outcomes in writing.

Finding 4: Teachers Perceived a Multitude of Challenges in Teaching Writing

The fourth finding emerged from Theme 4 and revealed a series of challenges encountered by the teachers in teaching writing, such as basic writing skills and student motivation. Two studies demonstrated similar results in which students who were less motivated were less successful.^{56,53} These studies revealed the obstacles faced by educators in their efforts to enhance students' writing abilities.

A significant concern raised by current participants was the lack of basic writing skills among their students. Teachers mentioned that students struggled with basic grammar rules, including the use of capitals, which hindered the clarity and readability of their writing. Similarly, other studies found that building a stronger foundation in grammar and mechanics was deemed essential to improving students' writing proficiency.^{56,57} Teachers in our study mentioned needing to reteach conventions and sentence construction before progressing to paragraphs and essays.

In addition to the challenges related to basic writing skills, teachers in the study expressed concerns about student motivation in writing. Participants highlighted difficulties in inspiring students to engage in writing, especially when the topics provided did not resonate with their interests. Two more studies found that students were more engaged when the material was relevant to them.^{53,56} The teachers in our study also mentioned that the uninspiring nature of state testing topics was a particular challenge because students were required to persevere through writing tasks despite their lack of personal interest in the given subjects. In conclusion, this finding highlighted the multifaceted challenges teachers encounter in teaching writing. From grappling with students' basic writing skills, such as grammar and capitalization, to the continuous effort needed to motivate students, the teachers revealed the intricacies of fostering writing proficiency in their classrooms.

Finding 5: Teachers Believed They Received Inadequate Writing Pedagogy Training During Their Teacher Preparation Programs

The fifth finding emerged from Theme 5 was that teachers believed they received inadequate writing pedagogy training during their TPPs. Effective writing instruction is vital to a well-rounded education, empowering preservice teachers to express their ideas coherently and creatively.⁷ This finding is supported by other research that found that preservice teachers' abilities to teach writing effectively are often influenced by the training they receive during their TPPs.¹ A different study found that policymakers have long blamed TPPs for not better preparing preservice teachers to teach reading and writing.⁷ This finding may be underscored by lower standardized test scores. Conversely, another study found that TPPs equip preservice teachers with the skills needed to better serve their students.⁶

A prevailing concern among the participants was that although their TPPs provided teacher training, there was a lack of dedicated writing classes in their TPPs. Instead of receiving specialized instruction in writing, some teachers recalled learning about teaching writing through indirect or incidental approaches. This discovery aligns with another study's findings, which revealed that certain TPPs offered preservice teachers only a restricted perspective on classroom writing instruction.⁸ Further, the data obtained from the current participants' experiences supports a study's findings that only one fourth of TPPs offered writing pedagogy courses for preservice teachers.¹ Current participants further noted that their TPPs emphasized literacy development over writing instruction. Although literacy

development is important, the teachers' accounts revealed that writing was often relegated to a secondary role, with minimal emphasis on specific writing strategies. This finding corroborates those of another study which indicated that numerous TPPs provided methods and pedagogy courses for the primary subject areas (math, literacy, science, and social studies), but the content did not align with the teaching practices in schools.⁵⁸

Finding 6: Teachers Expressed a Need for Additional and More Comprehensive Training

The sixth key finding of the study emerged from Theme 6 and was that teachers expressed a need for additional training. The teachers emphasized the importance of continuous learning and improvement in the teaching profession. They communicated a hunger for ongoing PD to enhance their teaching skills and effectiveness. This result is supported by a study that found that PD enhanced teachers' abilities and knowledge.¹¹

Teachers in this study also conveyed a need for additional comprehensive training in writing pedagogy, specifically focused on teaching writing fundamentals, such as essay composition and paragraph construction. Although some teachers had received PD in this area, they expressed a desire for further training to better equip themselves with the necessary skills and resources for teaching writing effectively. This finding reflects Lee Shulman's 1986 theory of PCK that asserted teachers need both knowledge of the subject being taught and experience in teaching the subject.⁵⁹

Further, the teachers collectively emphasized their commitment to ongoing growth and improvement as teachers. They believed that continuous PD and support were essential components of their journey as educators. Moreover, a study found that continuous PD enhanced teacher effectiveness in the classroom.⁶⁰ Similarly, another study found that PD in writing pedagogy helped teachers better grow their writing skills.⁶¹ Thus, my study supports the findings in these studies that teachers believe that continuous PD is pivotal in nurturing effective and skilled educators.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations included sample size, inclusion criteria, participant self-selection, and potential researcher bias. We used a small sample size including nine teachers located in Arizona, Nebraska, and Washington who taught grades three to five. Sample size and inclusion criteria could limit the transferability of the study. The inclusion criteria for participation called for third to fifth grade teachers who had completed a teacher preparation program, have teaching credentials, and have experience teaching third, fourth, or fifth grade for at least 2 years. The participants were volunteers and opted in through self-selection. Researcher bias was the final limitation of the study. Our experiences with writing and teaching created possible bias. To address this potential bias, reflective journaling techniques were employed to ensure a clear distinction between the researcher's own perceptions and interpretations of the participants' responses.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice. Our first recommendation is to include writing pedagogy courses in TPPs. Recognizing the significance of comprehensive writing pedagogy training during teacher preparation programs is crucial in enhancing writing instruction. Therefore, the inclusion of writing pedagogy courses into all TPPs is vital to offering dedicated writing instruction courses that emphasize effective teaching practices

and writing strategies.¹ This recommendation is supported by a study that by providing preservice teachers with robust training in writing instruction, universities can better equip them to handle the complexities of teaching writing in their future classrooms.⁷ This step, in turn, will enable teachers to instill a love for writing among their students from the outset.

The second recommendation is to support continuous learning once teachers are in the classroom. Promoting a growth mindset among teachers is essential in fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. One study found that by advocating for continuous PD opportunities that address teachers' evolving needs and align with current research and best practices in writing instruction, schools can ensure that educators stay informed and up to date with the latest advancements.⁶² This recommendation is supported by a study discovered that continuous learning through ongoing PD is a cornerstone of effective teaching.⁶³ By supporting teachers' growth and effectiveness, mentorship and PD create a positive ripple effect, benefiting both teachers and their students.

Recommendations for Future Research. Effective writing instruction is a critical aspect of a well-rounded education, and teachers play a pivotal role in fostering students' writing skills and confidence. To ensure students' success in writing, it is essential to understand the factors that contribute to effective writing instruction.⁶⁴ Therefore, this topic requires further investigation in various areas to gain valuable insights into the effect of teacher confidence, training, and support on students' writing development. Some suggestions include:

- A longitudinal study of teacher confidence and experience that tracks the confidence levels of teachers in teaching writing over an extended period.
- An exploration of the role of mentorship for novice teachers to examine how mentoring support during the first year of teaching affects teachers' confidence, skill development, and preparedness for teaching writing.
- Additional research on the long-term effects of comprehensive training that explores how continuous PD impacts teacher confidence, instructional practices, and student achievement over time.
- Qualitative research focusing on assessing the influence of writing pedagogy training which compares the outcomes of teachers who received specialized training in writing instruction with those who did not.

6. CONCLUSIONS:

Writing pedagogy courses and ongoing PD are essential for teachers to be effective in the classroom. This study explored third- to fifth-grade teachers' training and their perceptions of their confidence in their ability to teach writing. The conceptual framework that grounded this study included Bandura's 1977 theory of self-efficacy and Shulman's 1986 PCK model.^{59,65} The participants shared valuable insights based on their experience and perceptions that will inform the field of education on the importance of writing pedagogy courses in TPPs and in PD.

Many researchers have argued that writing pedagogy courses and continuing PD are essential for teachers to hone their skills and to build confidence.^{1,7,64} Researchers have also argued that the more confident a teacher is, the more effective they are in the classroom.⁶⁶ Notably, the participants of the study indicated that they did not receive writing pedagogy training in their TPPs. Further, the participants reported that mentoring, PD, and additional training enhanced their knowledge, ability, and confidence. The findings present alignment with the

recommendations of researchers who reasoned that all TPPs should provide writing pedagogy courses.¹ Further, other research supported that PD is essential to teacher success.⁵¹ This study provides colleges, the field of education, administrators, and PD coordinators with an opportunity to reevaluate TPPs and PD curricula to better serve educators and students.

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